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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by the Khiam Rehabilitation Center for Victims of Torture, non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[29 January 2018]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Report monitoring the hate speech of Bahraini officials, journalists and Twitter users in November 2017*

Conclusion

595 media materials and messages that incite or help to incite hatred were monitored in November through following what is published in four official Bahraini newspapers and 230 accounts on social networking sites. 58 of those hate materials were monitored after announcing the deterioration of Ayatollah Sheikh Isa Qassim's health, and 103 of them were due to the mysterious security incident in Buri, which resulted in the explosion of an oil pipeline. Among the hate materials were two episodes on Bahrain TV, one of which included hate materials against human rights organizations including Amnesty International. In addition, official figures and journalists, including Assistant Undersecretary for Information and Follow-up at the Prime Minister's Court, Ibrahim Al-Dosari, Ministry of Information Affairs' adviser, Sawsan Al-Shaer, former MP Mohammed Khaled, and journalists Faisal Al-Sheikh, Farid Hassan and Mona Mutawa, continued to incite hatred.

Local newspapers

The media materials and messages that incite or help to incite hatred were monitored in local newspapers as follows: 24 articles in the Bahraini Al-Ayam newspaper, 47 articles in Akhbar Al-Khaleej newspaper, 11 articles in the Bahraini Al-Bilad newspaper, and 55 articles in the Bahraini Al-Watan newspaper. In addition, there is hate vocabulary that has become commonly used in the official media including terms such as traitors and spies.

It is no coincidence that detainees subjected to torture and degrading treatment hear what we read in some Bahraini newspapers, such as the terms published by journalist Faisal Al-Sheikh in Al-Watan newspaper: traitors, homeland betrayers, spies, descendants of the Persians and the Magi, in addition to other terms, which were monitored in 11 of Al-Sheikh's articles last November. This happens because the culture of impunity has prevailed and the local press has transformed into a device that polishes the violations of the security system.

The monitored media materials of journalists Farid Hassan, Faisal Al-Sheikh, Mona Mutawa, and Sawsan Al-Shaer – who write for the Bahraini Al-Watan newspaper – and other journalists not only incite hatred but also help to instigate tightening the democratic space of civil society institutions.

Moreover, journalist Mona Mutawa published four hate-inciting articles and 13 social networking posts, including two articles on the mysterious security incident in Buri and two other articles on children on November 3 and 22. She has published several hate-inciting materials related to children in the past two months.

Hate materials after the announcement of the deterioration of Sheikh Isa Qassim's health

It is noteworthy that the provocative tweets and two newspaper articles monitored between November 27 and 30, 2017 following the announcement of the deterioration of the health of the highest religious authority for Shiites in Bahrain, Ayatollah Sheikh Isa Qassim, included certain terms, such as the tweet of @heleen_qahtani: "This is an infidel!" Also, journalist Said Al-Hamad described the news published in the media about the health of Sheikh Qassim as "lamentations on Persian satellite channels".

Social Media

The post of former MP Mohammed Khaled calling for "chopping the bodies of the accused and feeding them to the dogs" is his most hateful tweet out of 14 others that were monitored. In addition, Assistant Undersecretary for Information and Follow-up at the Prime Minister's Court, Ibrahim Al-Dosari, posted 14 hate materials on social networking sites. Two of the accounts that incite hatred continuously are @dar_al5lefya, which posted 31 tweets, and @muhrraqone, which posted 43 tweets.

Out of 1,223 media materials posted on the social networking sites: Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, 103 materials that incite hatred were monitored over the mysterious security incident announced by the authorities relating to the explosion of an oil pipeline in Buri area.

In addition, Arabic hash tag # (Bahrain oil pipelines set on fire) has been extensively activated from Saudi Arabia after the first tweet was posted by **@SaudiNews50**, which is followed by more than 10 million followers, at 12:00 pm on 11/10/2017.

The BFHR collected and analyzed 1223 materials after noting the high rate of hate materials in the tweets that included this hashtag (Bahrain oil pipelines set on fire). The percentage of Saudi users who posted this hashtag in the first period was 66%. Then between November 10 and 30, 2017, this hashtag along with other hashtags relating to the subject were posted by the following percentages: KSA: 33%, Bahrain: 33%, United Arab Emirates: 33%. This raises questions about the role of the electronic Saudi army in broadcasting hate materials, and the nature of the cooperation between the electronic armies that media reports talk about in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the UAE with regard to inciting hatred.

Bahrain TV

The TV show "My Responsibility" hosted by Adviser of the Ministry of Information Affairs, Sawsan Al-Shaer, and aired on Bahrain's official television, broadcasted a number of hate materials in the two episodes that were monitored on 11/14/2017 and 11/21/2017.

The episode of "My Responsibility" that was aired on 11/14/2017 lasted for 32:52 minutes and included 18 hate-inciting phrases. 25 minutes into the episode, Al-Shaer disrespected the Shiite Muslims beliefs, especially those in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain, and described them as servants of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In addition, she disrespected the beliefs of Shiite Muslims about Imam Mahdi in more than one phrase throughout the episode.

In the episode of "My Responsibility" that was aired on November 21, 2017, hate messages against international human rights organizations, including Amnesty International, were monitored at 32:12. In addition, Al-Shaer published ten articles in the Bahraini Al-Watan newspaper and four tweets on social media that include hate-inciting materials. The BFHR was not able to check the hate materials in Sawsan Al-Shaer's episode aired on November 28 on Bahrain TV because YouTube stopped broadcasting the episode because it contained content from Alfan Music, which was blocked by YouTube due to copyright infringement.

Recommendations

1. The Bahraini authorities should take immediate measures to end the hate speech of state political figures and journalists because of their role in discrimination against Shiites.
2. The Bahraini authorities must take measures to counter hate speech of political figures and government journalists in the media and on social media.
3. Member States of the Human Rights Council should pressure the Bahraini authorities to bring domestic legislation in conformity with the 2008 Camden Principles and the 2012 Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred.
4. Amend Article 172 of the Penal Code promulgated by Legislative Decree No. 15 of 1976 to include the following: Punish anyone with legal or illegal authority, who practices discrimination or apartheid in violation of the principle of equality and equal opportunities between citizens on grounds of origin, color, religion, sect, faith or political opinion. Also, discrimination and apartheid in the article shall have the meanings set forth in the 1965 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the 1973 Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid. Moreover, if the perpetrator is a public sector employee or someone appointed to a public service, this shall be considered as an aggravating circumstance, and the discrimination and racial segregation shall be deemed to have occurred if an individual or a group of citizens is deprived of benefits, burdened by obligations, or labeled with labels that have non-specific criteria applicable to all citizens.

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*Bahrain Forum for Human Rights (BFHR), an NGO without consultative status, also shares the views expressed in this statement.